

# In A Nutshell

"**A Rose For Emily**" was American author **William Faulkner**'s first short story to be published in a national magazine (*Forum*, April 30, 1930). It was next published in a collection *These 13* in 1931 and went on to become one of the most anthologized American short stories. By the way, if you run across a copy of *These 13*, you might be able to get big bucks for it on eBay.

Faulkner had mixed feeling about the short story as form for his fiction. On the one hand, Faulkner refers to his short story work as "whoring." But, he also said this:

*Yes sir. You can be more careless, you can put more trash in [a novel] and be excused for it. In a short story that's next to the poem, almost every word has got to be almost exactly right. In the novel you can be careless but in the short story you can't. I mean by that the good short stories like Chekhov wrote. That's why I rate that second – it's because it demands a nearer absolute exactitude. You have less room to be slovenly and careless. There's less room in it for trash (source).*

Well, there's no trash in "A Rose for Emily," with its intricate plot and crafty pacing. One thing we love about this little masterpiece of horror is its openness and flexibility. The possibilities for interpretation are endless, and it inspires very creative interpretations, in large part because of its unconventional style. This story has something for just about everyone.



## WHY SHOULD I CARE?

*Ch-ch-ch-ch-changes! Turn and face the strange* – Oh, hi there. Sorry about that. We were just singing along to **David Bowie** on our record player. Who's David Bowie, you ask? What's a record player?

Okay, we get it. We try to be hip, but sometimes it's nice to visit the past. We might break out our David Bowie records, or even pop his cool movie into our VCR. You know, *Labyrinth*? The one where he played the Goblin King? Oh right, that was back in 1986.

Well, we can accept that. Really: things change, iPods are invented, music evolves. We at Shmoop know that the past is a fun place to visit, but it's not like we want to live there. Still, that's not always easy to do. Think about it: what things in your past do you miss? Maybe it's an old girlfriend or boyfriend. Maybe it's your childhood home. Maybe it's getting juice, crackers, and a nap (sigh, naps) at school. The point is, it's understandable to miss what you leave

behind. After all, these are the things that contribute to making you the person you are today.

But time moves on for all of us, and if we can't come to terms with that, well, bad things can happen. And that, Shmoopers, is what "A Rose for Emily" tell us. Time has passed Emily by. Her once-grand house is falling apart. Her once-respected family has fallen down the social ladder. What's worse, her own loved ones have all left her (or at least tried to).

Faulkner seems to be making a point: no matter how scary change can be, refusing to accept it is way scarier. If you don't come to terms with the fact that time is a-passing, you might as well be sharing a bed with a dead guy.

Well, maybe that's stretching it a bit. But that's what fiction is all about, right? Stretching reality to deliver a valuable life lesson. Just like our man Bowie says, we've got to "turn and face the strange," not run from it. So after you read this story, rush out and put his song on your iPod – bonus points if you buy it on vinyl.